

**District IV Citizen Review Panel Meeting
Central District Health Department
707 N. Armstrong Place, Boise, Idaho
Tuesday, March 3rd 2020 ~ 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM**

Panel Members Present: Brian McCauley, Kym Nilsen, Shannon McCarthy, Darcie Bobrowski. Nicole Noltensmeyer arrived at 4:05pm. Melissa Mezo and Teri Murrison absent.

Volunteer: Bevin Modrak, IDHW

Staff: Courtney Boyce (Central District Health), Laura Smith (Central District Health), Misty Myatt (Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW))

Citizen Review Panel Meeting Call to Order

Brian McCauley, Panel Chair, called to order the District IV Citizen Review Panel meeting at 4:00 PM. Quorum not established, transitioned to next agenda item. Melissa absent, transitioned to next agenda item.

Informal Q & A

Bevin introduced himself by discussing how he knew Melissa, a District IV CRP member, through the Behavioral Health Board. Bevin has been in Boise for 26 years. Bevin worked at the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare and was a clinical supervisor in the case caring team in child protection. Bevin said he was asked by Melissa to participate in the panel's efforts, as she hoped his historical insight would be beneficial for the panel. Bevin discussed that during his time, the department split up the permanency unit, and he helped develop that team. Bevin was employed at the department, when the Adoption Safe Families was enacted in 1996.

Brian discussed that the state has a strong approach for reunification, including placements with blood relatives that the foster child(ren) never lived with. Brian asked Bevin if he could provide context to policies that were developed 10-15 years ago, including those around reunification with kin that the child never lived with.

Bevin stated that child protection is a unique system, as it looks at children's mental health and if their needs were being addressed. Bevin continued that foster placements were disrupting for children, and the need to creating safe and stable housing environments. Bevin inquired about the backgrounds of the panel members, including those that were or previously had been foster parents or adoptive foster parents. Bevin identified how foster placements would sometimes happen in the middle of the night, with foster parents being told that children would not be placed there for a long time, but all other arrangements were full. Bevin stated that most children entering the foster care system experienced things that you would hope that they did not. Bevin discussed that foster parents may not be appropriately equipped with the skills, ability, and training to manage and understand behaviors, and the context of behaviors. Bevin said that there is a legal component that cannot be understated, even though it is a social system. Bevin said that child protection workers cannot declare children in imminent danger, as that is the role of the legal system. Bevin stated that when combining all of these factors, it isn't a good fit for the system. Bevin continued that the Adoption for Safe Children Act, was to push reunification sooner and with combined provisions.

Brian inquired about how much was department policy or state policy, in order to prioritize reunification. Bevin stated there was a balance with the legal/social aspect coming into play. Bevin stated that a number of parents experienced substance use issues, as this was the height of the methamphetamine crisis between 1996- 2000. Bevin said during this time period, a lot of children came into care due to SUD circumstances, with the parents relapsing and unable to continue custody or care plan. Bevin continued that with Adoption of Safe Family Act, permanency hearings would occur within the first year of being in custody, as the families had a right to address their issues.

Bevin said that it was an understood lens of renunciation that children tended to do better when reunified, as adoptive placements were not always stable when older. A CRP member asked how far did the department go on reunification efforts, including relative placements? Bevin said that during this time, there were a number of cases with grandparents, aunts and uncles for placement. Bevin said that it was not preferred children be placed with unknown relatives as it removes the child(ren) from their known support systems, institutions, and from within their community. Bevin said that there is not an easy answer, other than addressing needs of the community and the legal requirements.

Brian asked if there are any federal funding requirements or financial incentives tied to rates of reunification. Bevin answered that there were incentives built into the original policy but only for adoption, but as far as he could remember at that time, not for reunification. Bevin reiterated that federal funding was not tied to rates of reunification for the policies in place during his time, to the best of his recollection.

Bevin discussed how guardianships are not permanent. Bevin continued that sometimes children may be removed from adoptive placements, as the older the child gets the less stable that placement can become. Bevin said that his team worked hard to find appropriate, adoptive placements for children. Bevin said that this his team is the group responsible for Wednesday's Child, a successful practice that was used elsewhere that he worked on implementing. Bevin continued that he was aware that the first Wednesday's Child that was profiled, was not placed. He is now an adult. Bevin said that some of these children have significant issues that impair their ability to connect with potential placements. Nicole discussed how their family adopted a 12-year-old boy, due to Wednesday's child. Bevin discussed this program working in Eastern Idaho, and how he worked with reporter Jay Hidlebrandt, while Bevin was working in Boise in Child Protection. Bevin said that this was not a practice done at that time in the area, but profiling children able to be adopted elsewhere was successful.

Kym asked "What percentage of foster families, end up adopting?" Bevin said that was an individual struggle of case managers and department, given the limited resource of foster care families. This was a struggle as many cases when they adopt, they do not take on additional foster care placements. It becomes an urgency issue between the case managers, in order to find permanent housing, and the foster care system that has a shortage of foster care parents, in addition to federal statutes that encourage expedited permanency. Bevin discussed casting a large net with the placements, to include relatives, biological parents, and foster-care families. Bevin stated that big hearts are not enough, given the challenging behaviors of some of the children. Without having statistics, Bevin estimated that he would assume that 50% were placed with foster care families, during his time with the department.

Kym asked "When you had left IDHW, what changed?" Bevin discussed the permanency team and risk assessment/investigation team. Bevin described these teams. After stipulated agreement there would not be a shelter care hearing, when it looked like they would come into foster care, Bevin's team would address case. At that time, they had one specialized adoption specialist. Permanency team would pull together forms, screen for adoptive placements, carry case through termination and/or supervise placement efforts. This team had the positive experience off following through cases when they went to adoption. Bevin stated that when he left, the adoption rate had gone up, permanent foster placements transitioned into adoptive placements, and the team increased pre-adoptive placements such as out-of-state placement. Bevin said that there was an increased number of adoptive placements, and reduced number of guardianships. Bevin discussed there were a lot of challenges, although he felt that it was moving in a positive direction. He thought it was a good time for him to transition back into adult mental health system after he felt the department was moving forward.

Nicole inquired about de-facto custodianship. Bevin said that he was not familiar with this. Nicole stated that it is an interesting law that she described based on her general understanding - having read the law and having experience with this form of guardianship over a minor. Nicole described de-facto custodian ship is where a parent can go to the court, file paperwork, and file custodian for court. To file it only needs one parent's signature and does not require consent or communication with other parent. This custodianship is active until the minor turns eighteen. The parent that did not request it, cannot file to terminate the agreement. Nicole described a situation

where kinship placement would not have been appropriate, however child was placed with them, because they had the same legal rights as the parents due to the de-facto custodianship. Bevin said that he had not heard of this before, and seemed surprised at its legality as it could be an impingement on parental rights and due process. Bevin stated that this incident had not occurred during his time with the department, however he can see how this was implemented with incarcerated parents. Majority of diversion efforts were attempted prior to being placed into custody. Bevin said that during his time there, they were not able to look at the different aspects of prevention and diversion prior to child custody. Bevin related that his experience was over 20 years ago, however the turnover in the department was high in part due to high caseloads. Bevin said that at one point in time, three of staff caseloads were the sum total of those in custody from Region 3. He says that he knows those rates are much higher now, but was a demonstration of the high demand from caseworkers. Bevin continued that once a child came into custody it was very difficult to transition out of custody, given caseloads and demands, sometimes simple and quick methods were utilized. Bevin stated he heard there was only one judge managing child protection services, that in his time they had increased to two. That bottleneck system can make it really difficult, and can delay plans.

Shannon introduced herself to Bevin as an attorney stating that she works pro bono with GALs representing them in court. She discussed a previous case where a judge discussed the financial differences of adoption/foster care with the foster parent, while allowing simultaneously the foster parent to apply for guardianship and the biological parent to continue moving forward with the case plan in order to achieve reunification. , allow the biological parent would continue to move forward with case plan, seeking drug treatment. Shannon said she was looking for Bevin's thoughts on this process. Bevin discussed that the department is the legal guardian of all children in foster care, so the department would have had to agree to that. The judge could not make that independent determination. Once parental rights are terminated, then the sole legal guardian is the department, and they are in charge of the placement. Bevin said he was not sure of the statutes that allows judge to do that, as the department would have relinquished rights. Bevin said that it would not provide an incentive for the parents to continue with the case plan. Bevin discussed he would be interested in the legality of this practice, where there is a concurrent plan of reunification and permanency, and guardianship. Bevin said that some parents were marginally functioning, due to attempting to meet responsibilities within the case plan. When children are taken into custody, and the longer the children are kept in placement, the less incentive there is. Kym provided her reflections to this situation regarding her perspective as a foster parent.

Courtney inquired about trauma-informed care, and if there was secondary trauma training for staff. Bevin said that there was not formally, as the language of "trauma-informed care," was not in place at that time. Bevin said that the ACE study did not exist at the time he was within the department from 1995-2001. Bevin said that no one was talking about that component however there has always been an approach to meet psychotherapy needs for children. To expand this would have therapist address behaviors, which would provide foster families much needed context, support, and understanding of behaviors. Bevin said that understanding the behaviors includes, why, what they meant, and how to address it at that time. Bevin said that during his time with the department, that he felt the needle was moving forward. Bevin inquired, asking how much has changed. Brian answered by saying it was a yes/no answer, but that he felt there was increased awareness of foster care children, and their needs. He said that he felt there was improvement to the system, as it is the process that matters, as now there is a continuing dialogue and understanding that they need to do right by these children. Brian said that he felt within the cases he has been reviewing that he is generally encouraged with the system of change, as what is being done now is not what would have been done 10 years ago.

Bevin discussed how neuropsychology testing could be done for children that did not respond to interventions and how this could provide a better understanding of children. This testing could provide context to foster care families. Bevin discussed that instead of looking at psychology assessment for pre-adoptive placements, there would be increased benefit of assessing them earlier. It isn't just the foster parents, it is the biological parents that also need to understand their children's behavior, and how their behavior can contribute that. Bevin said that this testing and the subsequent results could help prepare everyone when the case is moving towards termination. Bevin was thanked for his time from the panel members, and then excused himself from the meeting.

Meeting Call to Order

Quorum established at 4:05pm, when Nicole Noltensmeyer arrived.

Motion: Nicole Noltensmeyer moved to approve the agenda as written. Shannon McCarthy seconded. All in favor, motion carried.

Motion: Nicole Noltensmeyer moved to approve the meeting minutes from February 4, 2020 as written. Shannon McCarthy seconded. All in favor, motion carried.

Foster Parent Contact Information

Brian asked the panel if they had an opportunity to contact foster parents. Shannon stated that one of the older children with in the case reviews was in treatment, did not establish contact. Darcie and Nicole did not contact foster parents. No other responses. Brian stated that he had a wonderful conversation with a foster parent, who felt the case was going well. Brian identified that the foster parent had some concerns. In order to identify the foster parent's concerns, it was determined to move into Executive Session.

Executive Session

Nicole called for a motion to go into Executive Session at 4:49 PM. Nicole moved that the Panel go into Executive Session under Idaho Statute 74-206 (1)(d) to review records exempt from public disclosure; seconded by Shannon McCarthy; confirmed by roll call: Nilsen, aye; Noltensmeyer, aye; McCauley, aye; Bobrowski, aye.

Motion: Nicole called for a motion to end Executive Session at 5:20pm, Shannon seconded, confirmed by roll call: McCauley, aye; Nilsen, aye; Noltensmeyer, aye; Bobrowski, aye. Regular session resumed.

Questions for Foster Parents

Brian discussed standardizing questions for foster parents, in order to have criteria to the discussion. Kym said that she would want to know how the system is working from their perspective. Brian discussed how he is reviewed the case prior to speaking to the foster parent, and this allowed him case-specific information. Brian discussed several questions may be beneficial, including but not limited to:

- What has gone well [within the system, with the child]?
- What has been your relationship with caseworker?
- Is your caseworker responsive?
- If you had a magic wand for systematic improvements, what would you use it for?
- Why were children moved from first placement?
- How can we prepare foster care parents better?
- Do you plan to continue to foster?
- Do you have any kind of relationship with the biological family?

Brian discussed how reading the files and assessing the guardians' perspective provides a temperature for how things are going. Nicole agreed with the questions, and also identified – do you have any kind of relationship with the biological family? Darcie discussed the benefit of the trauma-informed care piece, but that it did not identify the behaviors.

Misty stated that the IDHW have a standard set of questions that are used for their federal case review. Misty said that she would provide this information. Brian is discussing how this information and form of assessment is essentially qualitative research for the department, with the hope that as an outside source from the CRP, there would be more transparency when answering questions.

Brian stated that foster parents do not have to answer any questions. Brian said that he would like a standardize response via Google form to questions. Darcie said that she would create a google form for the panel. Brian and Nicole discussed the value of learning from the experience more, and then crafting the questions. At this time, the panel will receive the questions from Misty, receive questions from the meeting minutes, and provide outreach to foster families. The finalized questions for foster care parents will be re-evaluated at a later date.

Misty inquired about the process of requesting contact information from foster parents and if they would consent to speaking with CRP members. Misty said that if not able to get information from foster care parents, she will identify number of contact attempts. Misty said that she did not get anyone that said no last month, but this month they did. Brian requested that if a foster parent declines contact from the CRP, to please list their information on the shared case review list. Brian identified that he would like to make a contact as often as possible. Darcie specified that she would like to not omit that child's case up for review, even though the foster parents have declined contact with the CRP. Misty said she would like to know what is working and what is not working, with the list of contact questions, and contacting fostering parents.

Snapshot Template

Nicole identified confusion with the players regarding the statewide CRP report. Courtney discussed the background of who was involved, and how to reference their relationship with the panel. Courtney discussed that there was a misunderstanding from one of the individuals on the statewide call that provided a list of recommendations of items to add to the template, and after having a 1:1 conversation he was supportive of what the template was intended to do. He also discussed that each one of those data entry points was valuable, but understands the vision and the prioritization of the most valuable information.

Brian discussed the need to re-organize state wide calls, including who attends, the agenda setting process, and guarantee efficient and effective information sharing. Brian said it would be beneficial for a member of the oversight committee meeting to participate in the calls, however it is not necessarily benefiting the panels to have a unanimous consensus. Nicole discussed calls as well as the department will respond better to recommendations that have a path to the solution, rather than identifying the problem. Brian re-iterated that legislature are aware of the problem, but need a problem with a solution, and then if they like it – they can create a legislative response. Brian discussed that at this point, the messaging needs to be consistent in order to get the department to agree on the benefit of the snapshot, identify the value, and get it built in a way that makes sense. Shannon requested a PDF fillable form of the snapshot.

Public Awareness and Community Outreach

Brian discussed the intent of the citizen review panel to provide systems change recommendations to the department and state. Brian was interested in the thoughts on the panel, regarding outreach to the community and increasing public awareness of the CRP. Brian asked the panel, what good comes from that and what is the benefit? Darcie stated how the word to is likely get out after panel members continue to reach out to foster parents at 14 to 20 cases a month. The benefit is that this is an independent group of citizens that are not held accountable by the Department. This would be applicable for families that may fear retribution from the department. Another panel member discussed that the CRP is public knowledge however how relevant do we want to make ourselves?

Nicole said that she believes in the value of increasing public awareness, and that the input would be beneficial. An idea for this would be an ‘open-mic’ night situation, where the CRP meetings could be open for visitor discussion. This was discussed and given the length of the meetings, this could be possible for 45 minutes or so. This was not voted on, however will be tried out in June 2020, with the meeting room being changed to a larger space to accommodate the public. Brian asked if the CRP would like to do any form of marketing. Shannon said she prefers organic marketing. This was discussed further and that could include promotion through foster care Facebook pages, and ask those that are not able to make it to the meeting to provide written impact statements. It was also discussed that there would need to be parameters of the discussion, provide a sign-in sheet, and rules of public testimony. Through the CDH website, information could be collected regarding the CRP, and the aforementioned needs to the public, and it could be posted through the Facebook page, and on the main website. Shannon said that she could pass this information to GALs, the Youth Advisory Board, and Idaho Voices for Children. Shannon said that the promotional messaging should include a statement of purpose, image, guidelines for communication, and let others know they are open to share their concerns about the system while knowing open meeting law rules. Misty said that she has a contact that works with the Youth Advisory Board, and she will invite them to the next meeting.

Adjournment

Brian McCauley, CRP panel chair adjourned the meeting at 6:00pm.

The next meeting will be April 7, 2020, from 4:00pm to 6:00pm, in the Syringa Conference Room at Central District Health.

Meeting minutes prepared by Courtney Boyce.